

ЛИТЕРАТУРА

1. *Mitchell W.J.T.* Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture / W.J.T. Mitchell // *Art Bulletin*, – 1995 (December). – Vol. 76. – № 4. – P. 540–544.
2. *Рождественская Е.Ю.* Визуальный поворот: анализ и интерпретация изображений / Е.Ю. Рождественская // *Визуальная антропология: новые взгляды на социальную реальность* / под ред. Е.Р. Ярской-Смирновой, П.В. Романова, В.Л. Круткина. – Саратов: Научная книга, 2007. – С. 28–42.
3. *Шамсутов Р.* Забытые тексты татарских шамайлей / Шамсутов Р. // *Восточная коллекция*, 2002. №4. Казань, 2002. – С.34–43.
4. *Воробьев Н.И.* Материальная культура казанских татар (опыт этнографического исследования) / Н.И. Воробьев. – Казань, 1930. – 464с.
5. *Катанов Н.Ф.* Казанско-татарские литографированные издания с именами лиц Ветхого и Нового заветов / Н.Ф. Катанов. – Казань: Типолитография Императорского ун-та, 1905. – 4 с.

W. K. LEE

lecturer

*Academy of Visual Arts,
Hong Kong Baptist University,
Hong Kong, Republic of China*

NOT CANONIZATION, NOT ARCHIVE FEVER: REVIEWING LEE FOOK CHEE'S HONG KONG. PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE 1950-S

Abstract. Through reviewing the photographic monograph Lee Fook Chee's *Hong Kong: Photographs from the 1950s*, the author attempts to address recent phenomenon in visual arts and visual research, that is, canonization and the archive fever of using historic pictures in research and visual art practices. The author contextualizes the book project within the local milieu and the history of photography in Hong Kong in order to shed lights on the under-researched areas in Trans-Asia photography.

Keywords: Archive, Canonization, Historic Picture, Hong Kong, Pictorialism (Salon Photography), Visual Research

“Had I died sooner all would have been lost. But now, by chance, we have met. You can save my photos! We must keep my photographs alive for Hong Kong.” – Edward Stokes quoting Lee Fook Chee, from “One Man's Legacy,” in Lee Fook Chee's *Hong Kong*.

My what turned out be misplaced skepticism was awakened when I first learned about Edward Stokes and Patricia Chiu's Lee Fook Chee's *Hong Kong*:

Photographs from the 1950s (2015). I imagined a casual reader aimlessly fingering a coffee-table book and indulging him- or herself in a visual journey through beautifully and rigorously printed black-and-white images of old Hong Kong. Anthologies of historic pictures of Hong Kong – Hong Kong Colours: 1940s–1960s (2013), edited by Ko Tim-keung and Edwin Kin-keung Lai, for example; First Photographs of Hong Kong, 1858–1875 (2011); and Hong Kong As It Was: Hedda Morrison's Photographs, 1946–47 (2009) – have become a popular genre in the postcolonial territory.

As Patricia Chiu writes, in the chapter titled “Rediscovering the Past,” [A]fter 1997, and a few years into their new identity as citizens of the Special Administrative Region of China, Hong Kong people, striving to construct a new identity, were looking for records of the past to remind them of their history. Historic photos were in demand from publishers, researchers, educators and collectors; and tourists visiting the new Hong Kong were intrigued to explore the changes and continuities in the territory” [5, p. 173]. Such a nostalgic urge has in the past two decades given rise to plentiful publications of this genre in both Chinese and English.

Another layer of skepticism emerged after I read the background of the book project in Edward Stokes's chapter “One Man's Legacy.” In a nutshell, this is a story of the encounters between two photographers, the Singapore-born and Hong Kong-based Lee Fook Chee and the Australia-born and Hong Kong-based Edward Stokes. They met by chance in November 2010 at the Peak, the tourist landmark in Hong Kong: The eighty-three-year-old Lee was selling his black-and-white prints of 1950s Hong Kong and Stokes bought three prints from Lee. The men not only traded photographic prints; they also exchanged addresses. Stokes was fascinated by Lee's photography and that is how the tale begins [5, p. 1–4].

One photographer rescues another photographer's photos is a cliché to describe this project. We are very much exposed, saturated, and perhaps immune to such heroic stories. For example, there was the 2007 discovery of Vivian Maier's work by John Maloof, and Levi Bettwieser in 2015 founded “The Rescued Film Project.” The stories told suggest narratives of the unsung hero(ine) to be discovered and then glorified. These projects – and that by Stokes and Lee – use the idea of retrieving unnoticed photographic personal archives with the goal of filling in missing pieces in the puzzle of the history and the discourse of photography. They are based not only on evidence of photographic history, but also on evidence of lack. The use of archives and documents is trendy in contemporary art and in particular in photography, for example, Okwui Enwezor's curatorial project ‘Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art’ at the International Center for Photography in 2008.

Could I, then, review these archival efforts and not perceive them as fashionable? Could I cut through my skepticism by contextualizing Stokes and Lee's project within the history of photography in Hong Kong and find a place to spell out the “lack” in the discourse of photography in the territory?

Lee Fook Chee's Hong Kong is a publishing collaboration between the Photographic Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Hong Kong founded by Edward Stokes himself, and the Commercial Press, in 2015.

After years of editorial coordination and research by Stokes and the Hong Kong historian Patricia Chiu, this two-hundred-and-four-page monograph reprints Lee Fook Chee's works made in the 1950s. There are ninety-five black-and-white photographs grouped in seven geographical themes (Central District, Victoria Harbour, The Peak, Kowloon Peninsula, Hong Kong Island, New Territories, and Coasts and Islands); forty-one black-and-whites images and reproductions of documents to illustrate Lee's life; and thirteen color snapshots of Lee's involvement in the project, Lee's recent portraits, and Lee's color photography made in 2005. Stokes and Chiu contribute introductory text, essays, and extended captions.

The book showcases many forms and layers of history – textual, visual, and photographic, as well as biographical and personal – and many histories: of Hong Kong, of Southeast Asia, and those of immigration, maritime life, technology, social mores, and occupational, for example.

How can we identify, attribute, and categorize Lee Fook Chee's photography in the canon of the medium in twentieth-century Hong Kong? In his introduction [5, p. 4–5], Stokes presents the context of other photographers who were active in the 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong. I understand and agree with Stokes's attempt to contrast Lee's photographic works and style with those of the salon photographers who were popular in postwar Hong Kong. Images of Hong Kong by salon photographers are known to be "pictorialistic"; Lee's work is a more candid and straightforward portrayal of the territory. The reason to compare Lee's works to those of salon photographers is that Hong Kong was once called "the Kingdom of Salon Photography," which represents a kind of "national identity."

In 2001, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum curated *Vision Beyond: Hong Kong Art Photography 1900–2000*, the first large-scale retrospective and survey to canonize the legacy of salon photography during that period. The "exclusion" of Lee in any documents of the *Vision Beyond* exhibition is inevitable, as he would have neither identified himself as a salon photographer nor participated in any salon-photography activities (such as exhibitions, publications, and membership in associations).

Lee Fook Chee's Hong Kong supplies another puzzle piece in the discourse of history of photography in East Asia (I assume that this is not the only venture; I anticipate further in-depth studies, in particular research on female photographers active in the twentieth century.) I make no attempt here to argue that Lee Fook Chee is the only non-salon photographer working at this time in Hong Kong, and it is not my intention to dichotomize photography in this period as salon photography and non-salon photography.

As Lee's works, life, and career are documented in this book, readers are refreshed by the range of photography in the 1950s. Not only could we not define

Lee as a salon photographer, but it is also challenging to identify him, his works, and his short-lived career in any single category.

Unlike the salon photographers in Hong Kong, many of whom were affluent and took up the camera as a leisure activity, Lee was a practical man. Photography for him was a job. He was a self-employed and self-taught photographer who took pictures of tourists and sold prints of Hong Kong's landmarks to them. His works range from portraiture, landscapes to street scenes. He went on excursions to various parts of Hong Kong, took pictures, made prints, and then sold them to people who were interested in the subject matter, not in his personal photographic style.

The essay "Lee Fook Chee, Immigrant Photographer" draws on the research of the Hong Kong historian Patricia Chiu. From May to August 2012, Chiu conducted twelve oral-history interviews with Lee at the rehabilitation hospital and nursing home in which he spent his last year. It is a relief to see that another layer of historical juxtaposition does not take place in Chiu's narrative: that is, to parallel Lee's oral history with the meta-narrative of development in photography in Hong Kong. The oral history is instead grounded by the socioeconomic history of the territory. For me, such rhetoric separates Lee Fook Chee's work and life from Hong Kong's "Kingdom of Salon Photography" discourse.

Lee did not identify himself as part of the salon circle, nor did he work as a fine-art photographer. It was not until the 1990s that he recognized the importance of his historic pictures of Hong Kong as a business opportunity. After decades of doing various odd jobs and working at small businesses, in 2003 Lee returned to his photography by printing the negatives he took in the 1950s and sold the prints as historic pictures of Hong Kong to tourists and galleries and even to Edward Stokes [5, p. 173].

Much about Lee Fook Chee and mid-twentieth-century Hong Kong is found in the one hundred nine extended captions. Coauthored by Stokes and Chiu, they provide information from their research on Lee's works and his life, and about the social history of Hong Kong and the region in general. In the chapter titled "Lee Fook Chee, Immigrant Photographer," the captions are informed by Lee's oral history; those in the remaining chapters consist primarily of visual analyses of the photographs supported by library research. These captions, condensed but still rich, not only are annotations of photographs but also, together with the essay "Immigrant Photographer," present stories and histories of many layers, from Lee's biographical details to the technical history of photography (for example, how color photography and color slides came into fashion in 1960s Hong Kong, which defeated and discouraged Lee); from the socioeconomic history of Hong Kong (of the lives and aspirations of the underprivileged class), to immigration and maritime histories of Southeast Asia.

Several intriguing photographs pinpoint a rather under-researched area in trans-Asia photography – the cross-cultural encounters on the sea as narrated by photographs. For example, an anonymous photographer took a picture of a woman

in a Japanese kimono standing next to seaman Lee Fook Chee on deck during the crossing of the Equator and the authors, through observation, make an attempt to question the gender identity of the “woman.” They write: “[T]he face and build of the kimono-clad ‘woman’ suggests a crossing-the-line ceremony – as does Lee’s relaxed body language, hardly likely with a Japanese female passenger” [5, p. 180]. The description and the commentary are speculation, but they are also new observations and research material for future work in multicultural maritime history and gender studies using photographic evidence.

Lee Fook Chee passed away in 2012, less than a month after Chiu conducted her twelfth interview. Reviewing Lee Fook Chee’s Hong Kong, a posthumous publication, not only sparks an interest in Lee and his works but also raises questions and curiosity about tourists, everyday life, and commercial photography during that time and in that place. Lee’s death, as Chiu notes in the last chapter, prevents researchers and readers from further inquiry, clarification, and elaboration.

Chiu says in her conclusion that The Peak was not just a landmark for tourists to visit, a place to take pictures and to be photographed; it was also a place Lee would call home. The Peak and Victoria, the mountain and the harbor – recurrent if not obsessive subjects in Lee’s works – seemed almost never to attract the attention of the salon photographers. Lee Fook Chee’s candid portrayals of The Peak and from The Peak fill in a certain lack of visual record of the territory in the mid-twentieth century. Perhaps Lee’s pictures of the most mundane subject matter, overlooked by pictorialist photographers, have found their voice to speak to the identity crisis facing people in Hong Kong today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. First photographs of Hong Kong 1858-1875 / ed. by Cécile Lignon Art Projects. – Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China), 2010. – 198 p.
2. *Enwezor Okwui*. Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art / Okwui Enwezor. – N.Y.; Guttingen: International Center of Photography, 2008.
3. *Ko Tim-keung* and Edwin Kin-keung Lai (eds). Hong Kong Colours: 1940s–1960s. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Press, 2013.
4. *Morrison Hedda*. Hong Kong as it was: Hedda Morrison's photographs, 1946-47. Hong Kong: Photographic Heritage Foundation; Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
5. *Stokes Edward* and Patricia Chiu. Lee Fook Chee's Hong Kong: Photographs from the 1950s. Hong Kong: The Photographic Heritage Foundation, 2015.